

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /071 W

-----211004Z 040812 /22

R 190732Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6458

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, TS

SUBJECT: GOT REACTS TO "LIBERAL" TRACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: TUNIS 2590

1. SPEAKING THROUGH THE PSD PRESS AND THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED DAILY LA PRESSE, THE GOT HAS REACTED STRONGLY TO THE PETITION OF 168 PROMINENT TUNIS PROFESSIONALS CALLING FOR A NATIONAL CONFERENCE TO EXAMINE ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN TUNISIA (SEE REFTEL). IN AN APRIL 16 EDITORIAL SIGNED BY PSD DIRECTOR MOHAMED SAYAH, PSD DAILY L'ACTION SAID THAT THE TRUE BATTLE FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN IN TUNISIA WAS FOUGHT IN THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THIS BATTLE, SAYAH SAID, WAS BASED ON "PERMANENT DIALOGUE WITH THE PEOPLE" AND THAT THE "SOCIAL COMPACT" (SIGNED JANUARY 19) IS AMPLE PROOF THAT THE NATIONS IS WORKING TOWARD THE TURE BENEFIT OF THE PEOPLE. HE SAID THAT THE PRESENCE OF SEVEN EX-MINISTERS AMONG THE SIGNERS OF THE PETITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS ONLY SHOWS

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THAT ITS AUTHORS ARE MOTIVATED BY A THIRST FOR POWER. HAVE THESE FORMER MINISTERS COME, SAYAH ASKED, TO THE POINT OF ALLYING THEMSELVES WITH ANARCHISTS AND PROPONENTS OF VIOLENCE? IN A SECOND, LENGTHIER EDITORIAL ON THE PETITION PUBLISHED APRIL 17, L'ACTION REVIEWED THE ROLE OF COMMUNISTS IN TUNISIA'S INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE AND SOUGHT TO CONNECT THE HUMAN RIGHTS PETITION TO THE ANTI-

NATIONALIST ROLE PLAYED BY THE COMMUNISTS AND TO THE BEN SALAHISTS WHO SUPPOSEDLY SEK TO OVERTHROW THE BOURGUIBA REGIME.

2. GOT-CONTROLLED LA PRESSE ALSO ATTACHED THE HUMAN RIGHTS PETITION ON APRIL 16, POINTING OUT THAT IT FOLLOWED A PATTERN ESTABLISHED BY OPPOSITIONISTS OF RUNNING TO THE FOREIGN PRESS FOR PUBLICITY. (ALTHOUGH PETITION HAS BEEN PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE FOR DAYS, FIRST PUBLISHED REFERENCE TO IT WAS IN APRIL 15 EDITION OF LE MONDE, WHICH APPEARED ON NEWSSTANDS APRIL 17.) LA PRESSE ALSO NOTED THAT THE AUTHORS OF THE PETITION WERE MOTIVATED BY PERSONAL POLITICAL AMBITIONS SINCE "THEY KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE THAT FRANK AND HONEST DIALOGUE, FREEDOM OF OPINION, THE RIGHT TO STRIKE AND THE RIGHT TO VOTE, ETC." ARE INALIENABLE RIGHTS IN TUNISIA.

3. PARTY WEEKLY DIALOGUE JOINED THIS CHORUS N APRIL 18 WITH A FULL-PAGE EDITORIAL MAKING SAME POINTS AS L'ACTION AND LA PRESSE BUT NOTING AS WELL THAT TUNISIA ENJOYS EXCELLENT INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION AND FOREIGN OBSERVERS ATTEST TO THE DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER OF THE REGIME. DIALOGUE JUXTAPOSED THIS EDITORIAL WITH ARTICLE REPORTING ON UNDER SECRETARY HABIB'S CALL ON PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA.

4. COMMENT: GOT CLEARLY DISPLEASED WITH "LIBERAL" PETITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND PROBABLY BECAUSE IT CONTAINED SO MANY SIGNATURES OF PROMINENT CITIZENS. WHILE VEHEMENCE OF L'ACTION COMMENTS ON AFFAIR PROBABLY REFLECTS PRIME MINISTER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NOUIRA'S SENTIMENTS, IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT MOHAMED SAYAH MADE POINT OF ASSOCIATING HIS NAME WITH APRIL 16 EDITORIAL. THIS MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN INTENDED AS ATTACK ON TAHAR BELKHODJA, WHO HAS IDENTIFIED HIMSELF WITH NEED FOR GREATER LIBERALIZATION AND TOLERANCE OF OPPOSING VIEWS. WHILE "LIBERALS" NO DOUBT HAVE SOUND GROUNDS FOR MOST IF NOT ALL OF THEIR CHARGES, UNDERLYING OBJECTIVES ARE CLEARLY POLITICAL AND ARE DESIGNED TO EMBARRASS GOVERNMENT. REACTION OF PARTY AND GOVERNMENT PRESS IS AN OBVIOUS RESPONSE TO THIS CHALLENGE. MULCAHY

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## Message Attributes

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